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ABSTRACT

Homophobia is accepted and encouraged by society, particularly in the sterile world of academia which allows, promotes, and creates homophobia by not providing lesbian/gay specific texts, examples, assignments, and role models. Composition teachers can make the classroom a safer place for lesbian/gay students, teachers, texts, and issues by: (1) including explicitly lesbian/gay literature by lesbian/gay writers in assigned course work; (2) rejecting texts and eliminating assignments/examples which exclude lesbians and gays; (3) using oral examples of lesbian/gay issues, role models, and individuals in the same breath as examples of heterosexual issues, role models, and individuals; (4) creating specific lesbian/gay elective classes; and (5) coming out to students as lesbians, gay men, and supporters of lesbian and gay equality. (A list of suggested readings for instructors and texts for classroom use is attached.) (RS)

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The Lesbian and Gay Student

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Homophobia is accepted and encouraged by society, particularly in the sterile world of academia which allows, promotes, and creates homophobia by not providing Lesbian/Gay specific texts, examples, assignments, and role models. Lesbian/Gay individuals who are "out" in other areas of their lives are suppressed in a classroom which negates the importance of Lesbian/Gay identity. Individuals who have questions about their sexuality often withdraw entirely into themselves. In short, Lesbians and Gays are conveniently (and too easily) silenced by the Straight White Male University. The effect on the Lesbian/Gay student is the halting of growth in her/his process as a writer and individual.

Instructors need to provide a space for all individuals to experiment with all forms and styles and subjects. Homoeroticism, Lesbian/Gay politics, Lesbian/Gay health issues, etc. are topics which can and should be written about by students straight and gay. Often, however, teachers interested in bringing up such subjects in their classrooms begin by presenting them as questions: "Do Lesbians and Gays have a right to adopt children?" or "Does Gay marriage have a place in contemporary society". Besides condescending to students, such questions imply that Lesbians and Gays may not have such inalienable rights if a clear argument can be presented. A student who writes a homophobic essay, then, must be rewarded for having a strong thesis statement and development. Lesbian/Gay students are put on the spot to come out in the center of aggressive, angry debate. (Besides, we would never ask students, "Do you think Blacks have the right to adopt children?" or "Does heterosexual marriage have a place in our society?")

Instead, focusing an assignment on the writer's own process and not on final product gives the writer a chance to make discoveries in his/her own space. By introducing Lesbian/Gay issues through texts written by Lesbian and Gay individuals with no apologies or questions about their relevancy,

CS21275

here to stay. Teachers may respond to homophobic statements with their true reservations as part of their feedback to the writer's process.

Here, finally, is a list of some basic suggestions for making the classroom a safer space for Lesbian/Gay students, teachers, texts, and issues:

1.) Including explicitly Lesbian/Gay literature by Lesbian/Gay writers in assigned course work.

2.) Rejecting texts and eliminating assignments/examples which exclude Lesbians and Gays.

3.) Using oral examples of Lesbian/Gay issues, role models, and individuals in the same breath as examples of Heterosexual issues, role models, and individuals.

4.) Creating Lesbian/Gay specific elective classes.

5.) Coming out to students as Lesbians, Gay men, and supporters of Lesbian and Gay equality.

Attached is a list of readings I've found helpful in researching education as it relates to Lesbian/Gay students and teachers as well as a list of Lesbian/Gay specific texts which can be successfully incorporated into a composition class.

Suggested Readings for Instructors

AWP Chronicle. March/April, 1990. Vol. 22. No. 5. (A Publication of the Associated Writing Programs.)

Berg, Allison, et. al. "Breaking the Silence: Sexual Preference in the Composition Classroom." Feminist Teacher. Vol. 4. Nos. 2/3, 29-32.

Bleich, David. "Homophobia and Sexism as Popular Values." Feminist Teacher. Vol. 4. Nos. 2/3, 21-28.

Bulkin, Elly and Joan Larkin, editors. Lesbian Poetry. Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981. (Includes essays by Ms. Bulkin on teaching Lesbian poetry to a Freshman class.)

Grubb, Page. "Reading About Homosexuality." Journal of Homosexuality. 13.2-3. (Winter 1986/Spring 1987): 121-135.

Parmeter, Sarah Hope and Irene Reti, editors. The Lesbian in Front of the Classroom. Santa Cruz: HerBooks, 1988. (Includes, as part of Ms. Stein's essay "What's a Lesbian Teacher to Do?", an invaluable list of further suggestions for readings on Lesbian/Gay issues in education.)

Crew, Louie, editor. The Gay Academic. Palm Springs: ETC Publications, 1978.

Also. . . you can call A Different Light at 1-800-343-4002 for a catalog of Lesbian/Gay specific texts on all subjects.

Suggested Texts for Classroom Use

Fiction:

Baldwin, James. Another Country.
Giovanni's Room.

Brown, Rita Mae. Rubyfruit Jungle.

Bulkin, Elly, editor. Lesbian Fiction.

Drama:

DeVeaux, Alexis. The Tapestry. (In Nine Plays by Black Women.)

Orton, Joe. Entertaining Mr. Sloane.

Poetry:

Bulkin, Elly and Joan Larkin, Editors. Lesbian Poetry: an Anthology.

Morse, Carl and Joan Larkin, Editors. Gay and Lesbian Poetry in Our Time.

Composition Texts (if you must):

The Best of Hair Trigger. Columbia College Chicago. (May be difficult to get. Call college directly at 312-663-1600 and ask for the fiction department. Tell them you'd like their upcoming revised anthology to include more Lesbian/Gay/AIDS specific examples. There are some currently under consideration.)

Our Times 2. Bedford/St. Martin's Press.

Rereading America. Bedford/St. Martin's Press.

The Winchester Reader. Bedford/St. Martin's Press.

(Bedford/St. Martin's seems to be the only publisher of composition texts which handles Lesbian/Gay issues. Tell them you like what they're doing and offer suggestions. Tell other presses why you can't use their texts.)